

Investigação Φ Filosófica: vol. 2, n. 1, artigo digital 1, 2011.

A Critical Exposition of the Hidden-Indexical Theory

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Abstract: In this essay, I begin by highlighting the main features of the so-called ‘Hidden-Indexical Theory of Belief Reports,’ by focusing on the work of some of its leading proponents. In order to bring to light the very serious difficulties faced by the aforementioned theory, I subsequently go on to discuss Marga Reimer’s attempt to defend the theory against the sharp criticisms leveled by Stephen Schiffer. I will provide reasons for concluding that Reimer’s defense is unsuccessful.

Keywords: Belief Reports. Direct Reference. Unarticulated Constituency

Resumo: Neste artigo, principiamos com uma visão geral das características básicas da chamada ‘Teoria do Indexical Oculto’, enfocando a obra de alguns de seus mais destacados proponentes. Para trazer à luz as dificuldades muito sérias enfrentadas pela teoria supracitada, passamos em seguida a discutir a tentativa empreendida por Marga Reimer no sentido de defender a teoria das agudas críticas de Stephen Schiffer. Serão dadas razões para concluirmos que a defesa feita por Reimer não é bem-sucedida.

Palavras-chave: Atribuições de Crenças. Referência Direta. Constituição Não-Articulada

I

A quote from Recanati (1993) may help us see some of the theoretical choices available to philosophers in connection with propositional attitude reports:

Frege's Puzzle:

- (A) If two referential terms *t* and *t'* refer to the same object, and if two simple sentences "P" and "Q" differ only in that *t* occurs in "P" and *t'* occurs in "Q", then "P" and "Q" express the same proposition.
(B) If "P" and "Q" express the same proposition, then "John believes that P" and "John believes that Q" express the same proposition.
(C) Yet: In some contexts at least, "John believes that P" and "John believes that Q" do not express the same proposition even though
(i) "P" and "Q" differ only in that *t* occurs in "P" and *t'* occurs in "Q", and (ii) *t* and *t'* refer to the same object. (Recanati, 1993, p. 348)

The author goes on to note that Frege's solution consisted in dropping (A). This is certainly the case on the interpretation that equates Fregean thoughts with propositions. Now, (A) is at the very core of the direct-reference view of propositional content, as put forward by Kaplan and Perry, among others. If (B) is true, we had better drop (C), which had seemed to be forced on us by the empirical datum of opacity, and maintain, with Nathan Salmon (1986), that, contrary to appearances, "John believes that P" and "John believes that Q" are bound to express the same proposition. The fact that most of us have overpowering intuitions to the effect that (C) is true has led some direct-reference theorists to maintain that there is something wrong with (B).

Support for (B) is anchored on a certain view of meaning compositionality for natural languages. On one natural interpretation, if meaning compositionality is a basic feature of natural languages, the meaning of a sentence is a function of the meanings of its component parts, along with their syntactical arrangement.

It is arguably the case that any natural language is compositional to a large extent. Compositionality offers us a plausible explanation for our unlimited capacity to understand sentences we never heard before. We can understand them by virtue of knowing the meanings of their component words and the grammatical rules of

our language. No less importantly, it could also be proffered as an explanation for our capacity to *produce* novel sentences – sentences no one has ever uttered before.

A likely corollary of a meaning compositionality principle is that the meaning of a sentence should be preserved if words are replaced by co-referring expressions.

If we consider such sentence pairs as (1) “John believes that George Orwell was a great writer” and (2) “John believes that Eric Arthur Blair was a great writer”, we seem bound, on a direct reference view, to take them to express a relation – the belief relation – obtaining between John and the singular proposition containing Orwell/Blair and the property “being a great writer”. With the same relation holding between the same *relata*, Salmon and others find no alternative but to claim that the same proposition is expressed by (1) and (2).

Direct-reference theorists who challenge (B), for their part, are keen on emphasizing the limitations of the above construal of meaning compositionality. They would have us believe that there is more to the semantics of (1) and (2) than meets the eye – or the ear. The Hidden Indexical Theory, or HIT, for short, so-called for reasons to be explained below, emerged out of their efforts.

While one might be willing to renounce the claim that natural languages are strictly compositional, this has not been the line taken by HIT theorists. They are happy to say that a proposition is a structured entity, whose individuation is a function of its component parts and the nature of their arrangement. Their disagreement with theorists like Salmon rests on their willingness to explore the possibilities of a view of compositionality that is both more liberal than the one explicitly employed by Salmon and independently plausible as part of a description of the workings of natural language.

As Crimmins (1992) points out, compositionality need not go hand in hand with what he calls “full articulation’ (*op. cit.* p. 9) If compositionality were to entail full articulation, the component parts of a proposition would in every case be the

content of some subsentential expression contained in the sentence which expresses the proposition in question. Now, on the direct reference view, the content of both 'George Orwell' and 'Eric Arthur Blair' in (1) and (2) above – what the names contribute to the propositions expressed by (1) and (2) – is just the man himself. Moreover, (1) and (2) do not differ in any other way as far as their linguistic expression is concerned. This being the case, on the view that takes belief ascriptions to express relations between a believer and proposition believed, full articulation would ensure that the same proposition is expressed by (1) and (2).

But if compositionality is not necessarily fully articulated, it might be the case that the semantic make-up of (1) is not the same as that of (2). The propositions expressed by (1) and (2) could differ in virtue of including a component which is not the content of any expression in the linguistic surface of the sentences expressing those propositions. As we will see in the next section, it is arguably the case that a natural language like English is not in general constrained by the demands of full articulation. As we shall have ample occasion to see, HIT theorists make essential use of this fact.

II

In this section I am concerned to present a brief statement of the Hidden-Indexical Theory, which was put forward in somewhat different forms by Schiffer (1977, 1992), Crimmins and Perry (1989) and Crimmins (1992). In the next section,

I will have a little more to say on a crucial distinction between two of its most representative implementations.^{1/2}

Strictly speaking, HIT is best thought of as comprising a *family* of theories. I cannot hope to do full justice to the complexity of the views of its individual proponents. I am not particularly troubled by this. For, even though the individual theories are highly complex, my rejection of them – to which Section IV is devoted – is based on rather simple ideas, which I take to constitute powerful grounds for rejecting all such theories – however elaborately developed. In Section V, I will have a look at Marga Reimer’s interesting defense of the Hidden-Indexical Theory against what I, along with Stephen Schiffer, regard as the theory’s most serious problem. I believe that some important lessons may be learned from a look into these authors’ disagreement.

While all HIT theorists are decidedly anti-Fregean in including both direct reference and semantic innocence among their desiderata, they resort to a theoretical move that is reminiscent of Frege’s. The basic idea is that ascriptions like (1) and (2) do not only contain references to the believer and what he believes, the singular proposition that is the content of the belief, but also, as a third argument in a triadic belief relation, *how* the proposition is believed, the mode of presentation *under which* it is believed.³

¹ Mark Richard (1990) and François Recanati (1993) espouse similar views, but I hesitate to include them squarely in the HIT camp. Richard advances the bold claim that the verb ‘believe’ is itself an indexical, while Recanati’s views are fairly close to those of Perry and Crimmins. He departs from them in taking ‘believes that’ to express a dyadic relation between the agent of the belief and a *quasi*-singular proposition said to be both the content of the belief and the reference of the ‘that’-clause. Such a *quasi*-singular proposition itself contains the contextually determined mode of presentation tacitly referred to. Although Recanati’s theory would seem to be immune to criticisms of one of the main difficulties of HIT, namely its contention that ‘believes that’ expresses a triadic relation, it seems hard to square it with semantic innocence.

² Schiffer, as we will see shortly, later came to be highly skeptical of HIT.

³ As we will see, Schiffer (1992) thinks that the best conceivable version of HIT introduces tacit references to mode of presentation *types*. For reasons to be explained below, Crimmins (1992) avoids the mode of presentation idiom, while still holding that belief ascription sentences contain references to “ways of believing,” thought of as concrete cognitive particulars.

The datum of opacity would thus be accounted for: one might believe, disbelieve or suspend judgment on the same singular proposition when taking it in different ways, determined by the context of utterance and implicitly referred to.

On this view, the semantics of belief ascriptions is similar to that of sentences like (3) “It’s raining”. No explicit reference to a location is provided in (3). Still, if someone were to utter (3), the context of utterance normally suffices to determine the proposition he intended to express. The location where it is raining is, in the words of Crimmins and Perry (1989) and Crimmins (1992), an *unarticulated constituent* of the proposition expressed by (3) in a given context. It is unarticulated on account of the fact that there is no term in the linguistic surface of (3) carrying an explicit reference to a location. On this view, (3) expresses in elliptic form the same proposition that might be expressed by (4) “It’s raining here” or (5) “It’s raining there”. Just as one might say that there is an unexpressed, hidden indexical in (3), whose reference is contextually determined, so too, the Hidden-Indexical Theory claims, the modes of presentation specifying the *how* of the belief relation in ascriptions like (1) and (2) might be expressed, even in the absence of words actually carrying the burden of referring to those modes of presentation – which is why the reference is said to be *hidden* – and in a way that is dependent on the context – which is why the reference is likened to that of *indexicals*.

In the preceding paragraph, I said that for HIT theorists reference to modes of presentation is hidden, but only *likened* it to that of indexicals. I believe that a certain amount of caution is necessary here, lest we mistakenly identify the implicitly referred to modes of presentation championed by HIT theorists with anything too similar to indexicals themselves. Sentence (3) above has as an unarticulated constituent a location, which can be supplied as in (4) and (5) with sentences containing the spatial indexicals ‘here’ or ‘there’. But unarticulated constituency is, in general, not confined to such cases.

Thus, if one were to say that (6) “Mary walked to the edge of the cliff and jumped”, the implicit unarticulated constituent in the proposition expressed by (6), at least in most contexts of utterance, is no doubt “from the cliff”, not an indexical. Similarly, in (7) “Joe’s point was not relevant,” the unarticulated constituent is likely to be something like “to the issue we are discussing,” or some such thing. Another reason why the comparison with indexicals should be taken with a grain of salt emerges from a consideration of sentences like (8) “Robert’s book was a delight to read.” The proposition expressed by (8) in a given context could be that the book written by Robert was a delight to read or that the book owned by Robert was a delight to read or even that someone was delighted to read a certain book, a copy of which he plans to buy for Robert. In contrast with indexicals like ‘I’, ‘here’ and ‘now’, expressions like ‘Robert’s book’ are not associated with a fixed rule that determines for any token of the expression a reference picked out by that token. Thus, while (9) “I am very rich” is true in every case if the speaker – the person uttering (9) – is rich, (10) “Robert’s book was stolen” may be true or false, depending on what the reference of ‘Robert’s book’ is. No fixed rule tells us what the reference of ‘Robert’s book’ is; only the context does. This is the reason why Recanati (1993) insists on distinguishing the genuine indexicality of words like ‘I’ and ‘you’ from the sort of semantic underdetermination exhibited by other linguistic expressions. Now, in the case of belief ascriptions, there is no fixed rule whereby the reference to the relevant mode of presentation is determined. What is more, there is not even a rule which of itself determines whether a belief ascription of the general form ‘*a* believes that *b* is *F*’ is to be read *de dicto* or *de re*. The overall context of utterance is to be taken into account. Thus, it would seem to make better sense for the HIT theorist to claim that belief ascriptions are semantically *underdetermined* rather than *indexical* in nature.

In any case, HIT theorists have called our attention to an important and interesting fact about natural language. The phenomenon of unarticulated constituency would appear to give us good enough grounds to conclude that the semantics of English is not fully articulated. Not every propositional constituent that a proposition is comprised of is necessarily the content of some word in the linguistic surface of the sentence which expresses the proposition.⁴

But, if full articulation is rejected, this at least opens up the possibility that there might be some additional feature – one that is not linguistically encoded – in the propositional content of ascriptions like (1) “John believes that George Orwell was a great writer” and (2) “John believes that Eric Arthur Blair was a great writer.” A difference as regards this extra semantic constituent could be taken to explain the possibly mismatched truth-values of (1) and (2).

III

The earliest statement of the Hidden-Indexical Theory was, as far as I know, provided by Schiffer (1977). After a period of seeming dormancy, it was revived by Crimmins and Perry (1989). Their version of HIT is more elaborately developed by Crimmins (1992), who devoted a whole book to its defense.

As far as history goes, it seems safe to say that mounting dissatisfaction with Salmon’s pragmatic approach was a decisive factor in HIT’s revival. It should be noted that John Perry himself was once among those who supported a view reminiscent of Salmon’s. But as Perry himself acknowledges in a postscript to ‘The Prince and the Phone Booth’, his breaking ranks with the Implicature theorists owed

⁴ I am hedging a bit because not every interpreter is happy with the arguments in support of unarticulated constituency. Bach (1994) hints at the possibility that no proposition at all is expressed by sentences like “It’s raining”, though the possibility exists that a proposition might be pragmatically conveyed by a mechanism he elsewhere calls ‘conversational implicature’, whereby what the speaker means and communicates is a restricted version of what he literally says.

a great deal to Crimmins' arguments against "biting the bullet" after the fashion suggested by Salmon.

The phenomenon of unarticulated constituency now offered a way out to the singular propositions theorist who, being unwilling to bite any bullets in response to the Fregean, is keen on respecting ordinary intuitions concerning truth values. It now seemed clear that the singular propositions theorist is not *ipso facto* forced to maintain that, contrary to all appearances, the same proposition is expressed by belief ascription sentences like (1) and (2) above. Accordingly, Perry and Crimmins' work, which culminated in their 1989 paper, treats referential opacity as a real phenomenon, rather than as a persistent illusion to be explained away on the pragmatic level.

In its appeal to contextual factors pertaining to the context of utterance of belief ascription sentences, HIT is of course still 'pragmatic' in an important sense, but, as Perry and Crimmins write in their concluding paragraph, "it is a mistake to relegate pragmatics to matters of felicity and implicature. In the case of belief reports, it is central to understanding content and truth" (*op. cit.* p. 278). In that broad sense in which 'pragmatic' means roughly the same as 'contextual,' the proposition expressed by someone's uttering (3) "It's raining" is no doubt pragmatically determined. But, of course, utterances of (3) may express distinct propositions as uttered by different speakers. Some of these would be true, while others would be false.

Similarly, while the *how* of the belief relations expressed by (1) and (2) is contextually, and to that extent, pragmatically, determined, this is not to deny that the relevant ways of believing may, in each case, be full-fledged semantic constituents of the propositions expressed by these sentences.

Disagreements among HIT theorists tend to revolve around how best to incorporate such ways of believing, or modes of presentation, in the semantics of belief ascriptions.

The accounts advocated by Crimmins and Schiffer are representative of a significant split among HIT theorists.⁵ There is a fundamental disagreement as to how intimately close belief reporters are to the modes of presentation under which a singular proposition may be believed.

On Crimmins' view, modes of presentation – though actually he adopts another terminology – are themselves the objects of tacit reference.

This is how modes of presentation are brought to bear – on Crimmins' view – on the solution of Frege's puzzle. Crimmins would have it that in the sentence pair

- (1) John believes that George Orwell was a great writer;
- (2) John believes that Eric Arthur Blair was a great writer.

both the names 'George Orwell' and 'Eric Arthur Blair' have as their reference the man himself – even as they occur inside the indirect 'that'-clause. It bears recalling that according to Frege a name's reference in an indirect context is its customary sense in an *ordinary*, direct context. Thus, the references of 'George Orwell' and 'Eric Arthur Blair' are said to be distinct in (1) and (2). Since such an option is not open to a direct reference theorist like Crimmins, he is bound to incorporate modes of presentation differently in his solution of Frege's puzzle. He does so by claiming that references are made in (1) and (2) to particular, and distinct, modes of presentation,

⁵ Actually, Schiffer (1992) offers a conditional defense of the Hidden-Indexical Theory. HIT, he claims, is that best theory of belief ascriptions on the assumption that a natural language like English possesses a "correct compositional truth theory" (*op. cit.* p. 499). Because HIT is powerless against a number of objections Schiffer goes on to address in that same article, he denies that English has a compositional truth theory.

even though such modes of presentation are in no way made explicit and only tacitly referred to.

Crimmins' own take on belief reports is indissolubly linked to his views on belief as a topic in the philosophy of mind. Particular instances of believing, he holds, are individuated not only by the content of the belief – a proposition – but also by the way in which it is believed. For reasons that need not concern us here, Crimmins claims that such ways of believing themselves cannot be individuated by anything as coarse-grained as a Fregean mode of presentation or a belief state. Instead, they are said to be concrete cognitive particulars in people's minds and, therefore, irreducibly agent-bound.

A way of believing, according to Crimmins, is made up of "the concrete particular representations employed by the agent to represent objects, properties and relations the proposition is about" (*op. cit.* p. 100). Specifically, whenever a singular proposition is the content of a belief, the representation of the object the proposition is about what Crimmins calls a 'notion' of that object, whereas the representations of properties and relations go by the technical term 'ideas.' While Crimmins' ways of believing are responsible for representing the semantic components that a singular proposition is comprised of, they do not satisfy any publicity requirement as Fregean modes of presentation are expected to do. And, yet, these agent-bound ways of believing are, on Crimmins' view, routinely referred to by belief ascribers.

Crimmins' particularistic take on the entities supposed to specify how a singular proposition is believed is interestingly criticized by Bach (1993). Bach argues that even if Crimmins is right in supposing that instances of believing – the reality of which make belief reports true – are to be individuated by particular cognitive representations, it does not follow that such representations are part of what the report is about.

Bach draws our attention to an interesting analogy with what he informally calls ‘running reports’.⁶ If one were to say that (11) “Bill ran to work today” – the example is Bach’s –, the report is no doubt true if there was an instance of running to work by Bill on the day in question. If, for simplicity, we assume that Bill ran to work only once on that day, it is no doubt correct to say that (11) is true because of a particular instance of running to work by Bill. In fact, we can say that Bill ran to work on that day in some particular way *x*, the specification of which fully describes the instance of running which is behind the truth reported by (11). However, it evidently does not follow that (9) is short for (11) “Bill ran to work today in a particular way *x*.” For (11) would be just as true if Bill had run to work in a particular way *y*, say, at a different time of the day or by a different route. Intuitively, the person responsible for issuing the report would not take himself to have uttered a falsehood, should he realize that he was in error about the way in which the running took place. Instead, the content of the report is wholly indifferent to any of the possible ways Bill might have run to work on the day on which the report was made. So, it seems clear that there is no hidden reference to some particular way of running in an utterance of (11).

In much the same way, it sounds decidedly implausible to suggest that (12) “Joe believes that Bill ran to work today” covertly expresses what could be more fully stated as (12) “Joe believes that Bill ran to work today in a particular way *x*,” where *x* fully specifies Joe’s particular notion of Bill, his idea of running and so on. For (12) would be just as true if Joe believed that Bill ran to work on that same day in some other particular way *y*, involving other of his notions of Bill and his ideas of running and so forth.

This particular difficulty is avoided in Schiffer’s favored version of HIT. On Schiffer’s account, there is no actual reference to a *particular* mode of presentation.

⁶ In what follows, I offer a rather free adaptation of Bach’s argument.

Instead, modes of presentation are merely quantified over, while actual reference is to a mode of presentation *type*, thought of as a property the relevant modes of presentation are supposed to meet. Such a property imposes a restriction on the domain of quantification which the variable m , representing a mode of presentation, ranges over. In Schiffer's notation, the logical form of an ascription like (13) "Ralph believes that Fido is a dog" is given by (13)' $(\exists m) (\Phi^*m \ \& \ B(\text{Ralph}, \langle \text{Fido}, \text{doghood} \rangle, m))$, where the belief relation takes as arguments Ralph, the ordered pair representing the singular proposition that Fido is a dog and a mode of presentation m satisfying property Φ^* .

To achieve some understanding of the property Φ^* a mode of presentation is supposed to satisfy on Schiffer's account, it helps to turn our attention to ascriptions such as (14) "Nabuchadnezzar believes that Phosphorus is beautiful" and (15) "Nabuchadnezzar believes that Hesperus is beautiful." For (14) to be true, on Schiffer's view, it is necessary that Nabuchadnezzar believe the singular proposition made up of Phosphorus/Hesperus and the property "being beautiful" not just under *any* mode of presentation, as Salmon would have it, but under a mode of presentation requiring that Nabuchadnezzar think of the object in question as a bright star seen in the morning before sunrise. Similarly, (15) is true provided that there is some mode of presentation of Phosphorus/Hesperus requiring that Nabuchadnezzar think of that celestial body as a bright star seen in the evening after sunset.

Regrettably, difficulties abound for HIT regardless of whether one resorts to references to concrete modes of presentation or, more cautiously, to a property modes of presentation are expected to satisfy. These are difficulties I address in the next section.

IV

Some of the less obvious difficulties for HIT are of a somewhat technical nature. I will be concerned with one such difficulty. Schiffer (1992)⁷ presents arguments against the view that ‘believes that’ can be defensibly construed as a triadic relation, with a mode of presentation filling in one of the three argument slots. As Schiffer notes, the triadic relations encountered in ordinary language are such that their three-placedness is often made quite explicit. A verb like ‘give,’ by its very nature, would seem to express one such relation. In all instances of giving, *something* is given by *someone* to *someone else*. The three-placedness of ‘giving’ is on display in a sentence like (16) “Mary gave her daughter 2, 000 dollars”. In contrast, one would be hard put to find ordinary language counterparts of (16), where the alleged three-placedness of ‘believes that’ is similarly in the open. Needless to say, it would be question-begging to come up with examples along the lines of (17) “Ralph believes that Fido is a dog *in way w / under mode of presentation m*”.⁸ Loaded as they are with in-built technical jargon, sentences like (17) can hardly be proffered in support of the very thesis the HIT theorist is concerned to advance.⁹

But, as I see it, the most important difference between the triadic relations expressed by verbs like ‘give’, ‘lend’, ‘borrow’ and so forth and the allegedly three-place relation expressed by ‘believes that’ is clearly to be seen when we look at sentences such as (18) “John was given a book,” (19) “Jackie lent the money,” and (20) “Rick borrowed from Sue”. In all of (18), (19), and (20), we get a sense that we are missing *essential* information. It is exceedingly natural that someone should ask “Who gave the book to John?,” “To whom did Jackie lend the money?” and “What did

⁷ The discussion in this section is heavily indebted to Schiffer. However, I will allow myself to give it some twists of my own.

⁸ The example is Schiffer’s (Schiffer, 1992).

⁹ As we will see shortly, some examples in Reimer (1996) might be construed as sentences in which modes of presentation are explicitly expressed in plain ordinary language.

Rick borrow from Sue?”. The arguments that are missing from (18), (19) and (20) answer questions we are naturally *compelled* to ask if we want to know what states of affairs are *responsible* for the *truths* that might be expressed by such sentences. For (18) to be true it is necessary that John was given the book by *someone or other*. For (19) to be true, it is necessary that Jackie lent the money to *some particular person or persons*. Similarly, the fact that *something* was borrowed by Rick from Sue underwrites the truth one might express by uttering (20). Of course, if we are told that (21) “Helen gave the book to John”, that (22) “Jackie lent the money to Rose” and that (23) “Rick borrowed a thousand dollars from Sue”, we might be additionally informed that Helen gave the book to John *with a smile*, that Jackie lent the money to Rose *against her will* and that Rick borrowed a thousand dollars from Sue *with no intention of paying her back*. While we may ask for and receive the additional information conveyed by the words italicized above, they are not essential to the state of affairs responsible for the truths incompletely expressed by (18), (19) and (20) and more fully expressed by (21), (22) and (23). These sentences would still be true, if, counterfactually, Helen gave the book to John *with a frown*, Jackie lent the money to Rose *willingly* and Rick borrowed the money from Sue *with every intention of paying her back soon*. It is clear that the words in italics are not properly to be thought as logical arguments in the relations at issue but simply as incidental adverbial qualifications.¹⁰

Here we encounter a striking difference between ‘give’, ‘lend’ and ‘borrow’ and ‘believes that’. If one were to advance the supposition that, contrary to appearances, the verbs ‘give’, ‘lend’ and ‘borrow’ express dyadic relations, the readiness with which we could pose questions for which the missing arguments would give us the answers would easily prove the supposition wrong.

¹⁰ I believe that my way of addressing this issue gives us a more natural criterion of argumenthood than Schiffer’s. For him, an argument, unlike an adverbial qualifier, can answer a ‘whether’-question, such as “To whom did you wonder whether Mary gave the house?” (Schiffer, 1992, pp. 518-19).

In contrast, if we were to suppose, for the sake of argument, that ‘believes that’ expresses a dyadic relation between a believer and the singular proposition believed, we would not get a sense that (1) “John believes that George Orwell was a great writer”, as it stands, is informationally incomplete and that it really calls for supplementation along the lines of (1) “John believes that George Orwell was a great writer *in way w / under mode of presentation m*”, where the implicitly referred to modes of presentation are made explicit. The assumption that ‘believes that’ expresses a dyadic relation is not incoherent because we are not in the least compelled to ask “In what way or under what mode of presentation does John believe that George Orwell was a great writer?”. Even if we leave aside the technical ‘mode of presentation’ idiom and stick to the simpler “In what way does John believe that George Orwell was a great writer?,” it is not at all hard to see that this is not the sort of ordinary language question anyone would ever feel *compelled* to ask if we want to know what state of affairs is responsible for the truth we might express in uttering (1) “John believes that George Orwell was a great writer.” Sentence (1) may express a truth *regardless of* the particular way in which John might accept the proposition which could be expressed by (24) “George Orwell was a great writer.” If implicitly referred to modes of presentation somehow make it into the semantics of belief ascriptions, they are not *arguments* of the ‘believes that’ relation. At best, they could amount to elliptical adverbial qualifiers. In what follows, I will argue that even this much is very doubtful.

As far as I can see, the most powerful argument against the Hidden-Indexical Theory is one that is not particularly technical. Its force is vividly apparent to Schiffer (1992) and criticized by Reimer (1996). The greatest problem for HIT is that it is psychologically highly implausible to suggest that ascribers of propositional attitudes are aware of any referential intentions involving modes of presentation or types of such modes. A person who uttered (1) “John believes that

George Orwell was a great writer” would be hard put to say under what mode of presentation of George Orwell – and of the property “being a great writer” – John believes the singular proposition that George Orwell was a great writer. In fact, such a person would normally lack the very idea of modes of presentation. In saying that ascribers make implicit reference to modes of presentation, thought of either as types or concrete particulars, HIT theorists seem forced to say that belief ascribers, mostly nonphilosophers, invariably make reference to entities whose very existence they remain entirely unaware of.

It might be countered that ‘mode of presentation’ is a technical notion, mastery of which it would be ludicrous to attribute to non-philosophers. But that is hardly any help for the HIT theorist. We might opt to use less technical language and say that what is said by (1) is that (1) ` “John believes that George Orwell was a great writer *in some particular way w* ”. Even thus amended, it is still the case that belief ascribers do not seem to be conscious of making any tacit references to such ways of believing.

And things get worse. The difficulty is not simply that belief ascribers are not aware of the meaning intentions predicted by the Hidden-Indexical Theory. If an ascriber is asked what he meant when saying that (1) “John believes that George Orwell was a great writer,” he will predictably say that *all* he meant, *all* he is conscious of meaning, is that John believes that George Orwell was a great writer. In Schiffer’s words:

One trouble with the tacit-intention proposal [of HIT] is that it induces a rather radical *error theory*: not only do ordinary belief ascribers have no conscious knowledge of what they are asserting, they also turn out not to have the conscious thoughts they think they have. (Schiffer, 1992, p. 515)

Moreover, we should pause to recall how the situation thus created contrasts with the clear-cut cases of unarticulated constituency which the HIT theorist appeals to in his effort to make his views initially plausible. Anyone who uttered a sentence like (3) “It’s raining” typically has a clear sense of just what he intended to express, namely that it is raining at one particular place or other, and could, upon request, easily make the intended reference to a location known to others. As Schiffer (1995) points out, in the ‘paradigmatic’ instances of tacit reference exemplified by (3) the speaker has no trouble whatsoever in recognizing that the statement contains a reference to some location.¹¹

Therefore, thinking of belief ascription sentences along the lines suggested by a consideration of sentences like (3) might amount to little more than having recourse to a misleading analogy.

As we shall see in what follows, Reimer makes an attempt at rescuing HIT from Schiffer’s criticisms. Although I am not convinced by her arguments, I believe that the contrast between her position and Schiffer’s is well worth looking into.

¹¹ I wrote ‘typically’ because it might be objected that a speaker’s referential intentions need not always be fully determinate. One of Reimer’s examples should make this clear. As a resident of Tucson, Arizona, she could say on a torrid summer day that “It sure is hot.” Reimer’s tacit intention to refer to a location might be indeterminate in that she might not recognize herself as having determinately meant that it is hot in *Tucson*, as opposed, to, say, *Central Tucson* or even *Southern Arizona*, although she could see herself as having tacitly, and indeterminately, referred to all such locations. Schiffer (1995) admits as much and argues that the strongest possible version of HIT would similarly predict that belief ascribers make tacit, indeterminate reference to a plurality of types of modes of presentation. The reason for this is that it is not clear that modes of presentation should satisfy a single, well defined property. While such twists add considerably to HIT’s complexity, we need not be concerned in what follows with this amended version of the theory. For the amendments do not help in any way with the main difficulty faced by HIT, namely that ascribers are not aware of making tacit references to (types of) modes of presentation – determinately or not.

V

In his “Descriptions, Indexicals and Belief Reports,” Schiffer (1995) envisages the following scenario. A non-philosopher by the name of ‘Stella’ says, in the context of a casual conversation about the rich and famous in the French Riviera, that (25) “Jean-Luc Godard believes that Brigitte Bardot is selling her villa in St. Tropez and moving to Liverpool.”

If the Hidden-Indexical Theory of belief reports is correct, argues Schiffer, this would entail that Stella’s utterance of (25) contains a tacit reference to a type of propositional mode of presentation under which Jean Luc Godard believes the singular proposition that (26) “Brigitte Bardot is selling her villa in St. Tropez and moving to Liverpool.” Ultimately, such a propositional mode of presentation type will be comprised not only of a type of mode of presentation of Brigitte Bardot, but also of types of mode of presentation of the selling relation, Bardot’s villa, and the other semantic constituents of the singular proposition purportedly expressed by (26).¹²

The problem for HIT, of course, is that Stella is not aware of having intended to refer to any such type of mode of presentation. And if we ask her to what she meant in uttering (25), the predictable answer is that *all* she ever meant to say, and thereby, to communicate to her audience is that Jean-Luc Godard believes that Brigitte Bardot is selling her villa in St. Tropez and moving to Liverpool. If HIT is correct, belief ascribers, like Stella, are systematically in error as regards their communicative intentions. Furthermore, there appears to be a clear difference between (25) as uttered by Stella, and her utterance of (3) “It’s raining”. In the latter

¹² In what follows, I shall be solely concerned with the alleged tacit reference to a type of mode of presentation of Brigitte Bardot. I am also deliberately ignoring the way Schiffer amends HIT by introducing indeterminate references to a plurality of modes of presentation types.

case, but not in the former, she will most definitely recognize her intention to tacitly refer to some location or other.¹³

According to Reimer, Schiffer's arguments, while deserving to be taken seriously, ultimately fail as a critique of HIT, which, to her mind, is a rather plausible theory of belief reports. Her reply to Schiffer addresses the two aspects of what she refers to as the problem of "conscious access" – the fact that belief ascribers are not aware of the allegedly tacit reference to types of modes of presentation – and the seeming disanalogy between such tacit reference, as it is predicted by HIT, and the "paradigm cases" of tacit reference exhibited in sentences like (3). Let us start with the former problem.

Her disagreement with Schiffer rests on her claim that belief ascribers may in fact recognize that they do make tacit references to types of modes of presentation provided such ascribers are "given suitable prompting" (*op. cit.* p. 411). This possibility, she argues, should be sufficient to establish the plausibility of the Hidden-Indexical Theory. After all, it is easy in philosophy to come up with equivalences such as that between (27) "All *F*'s are *G*'s" and the way such a sentence would be represented in the language of first-order logic, which are similarly not the sort of equivalences that non-philosophers would immediately recognize, even though they might *come* to recognize them given suitable prompting, say, in the context of a logic class. The fact that such equivalences are not *normally* in the ken of ordinary folk hardly gives us a reason to dismiss them.

The woman named 'Stella' in Schiffer's example, argues Reimer, could be *prompted* to admit that she did make a reference to something very much like a type of mode of presentation of Brigitte Bardot through her utterance of (25) "Jean-Luc

¹³ Again, I am deliberately ignoring the complication introduced by the possibility that Stella might be indeterminately referring to a number of different locations, such as St. Tropez, the French Riviera, Southern France, and so on.

Godard believes that Brigitte Bardot is selling her villa in St. Tropez and moving to Liverpool”.

In the fictional situation envisaged by Reimer, Stella could have been in the company of Jean-Luc Godard while they were both looking at an old picture of Brigitte Bardot reproduced in a tabloid. The picture, taken thirty years before the present day, is of a very young and beautiful Brigitte Bardot. Underneath the picture, the caption reads FAMOUS FRENCH BEAUTY TO SELL ST. TROPEZ VILLA AND MOVE TO LIVERPOOL. It is a known fact to Stella that Jean-Luc Godard believes everything he reads in the tabloids. Under the circumstances, Stella seems to have good grounds to go on to utter (25).

Is Stella aware of having meant to refer to anything like a mode of presentation of Brigitte Bardot? Reimer’s contention is that Stella could well *come* to recognize that she did mean to communicate through her utterance of (25) just what is predicted by HIT. For one could present Stella with the following hypothetical scenario. Jean-Luc Godard attends animal rights meetings in Manhattan, meetings which are also attended by Brigitte Bardot. He remains entirely unaware of the fact that the eccentric, middle-aged woman, known to him in this setting as ‘Brigitte Bardot’ is none other than the woman whose photograph he earlier saw in the tabloids. Even though Godard speculates that the older woman might be the mother of the young beauty, he never suspects that they are the same person. He is under the impression that the middle-aged woman is also a resident of Manhattan. Naturally enough, he has no reason to think that *this* woman is selling a villa in St. Tropez and moving to Liverpool.¹⁴

It might then be inquired of Stella what precisely she had meant by her previous utterance of (25) and whether she stands by its truth. As Reimer points out, Stella would likely stand by what she had said earlier, though she would

¹⁴ As Reimer rightly notes, the scenario is reminiscent of Kripke’s Pierre. (Kripke, 1979)

reformulate her previous statement while coming up with something like (25)` “Jean-Luc Godard believes that Brigitte Bardot, *whom he thinks of as a famous French beauty and actress*, is selling her villa...” Reimer’s contention is that (25)` only makes *explicit* what Stella had tacitly meant all along in her previous utterance of (25). As Reimer sees it, the non-inclusion of the italicized clause in (25)` is due to the fact that, in the original context of utterance, it was obvious both to Stella and her audience that Jean-Luc Godard thought of Brigitte Bardot in the way made explicit in (25)`, so obvious, in fact, that it went without saying.

On the flipside, if it is indeed true that Stella’s original utterance of (25) “Jean-Luc Godard believes that Brigitte Bardot is selling her villa in St. Tropez and moving to Liverpool” contains tacit reference to mode of presentation types that Stella can become aware of with sufficient prompting, then, Reimer goes on to insist, there would be no real contradiction between her earlier insistence that *all* she meant by (25) is that Jean-Luc Godard believes that Brigitte Bardot is selling her villa in St. Tropez and moving to Liverpool and her subsequent willingness to reformulate (25) along the lines suggested by (25)`. For the latter sentence would then express all she meant in uttering (25), though she was not *initially* aware that what she meant all along could be restated with such added precision.

That (25)` expresses what Stella had originally meant through her utterance of (25) can, according to Reimer, be made all the more evident if Stella, in the course of attending an animal rights meetings where Brigitte Bardot is known to everyone *only* as a middle-aged, animal rights activist, forms the resolution to communicate to her audience what she meant through her prior utterance of (25) “Jean-Luc Godard believes that Brigitte Bardot is selling her villa in St. Tropez and moving to Liverpool.” She would presumably not repeat this *very* sentence, which, in the new setting, would communicate something false, namely that Jean-Luc Godard believes that Brigitte Bardot, the animal rights activist, is selling her villa in St. Tropez and

moving to Liverpool. Instead, Stella would more likely than not tell her audience that Jean-Luc Godard is under the false impression that there are *two* women called ‘Brigitte Bardot,’ one of whom, a young French beauty, he believes is selling her villa in St. Tropez and moving to Liverpool.

Reimer concludes that Schiffer cannot be right. For if no tacit reference to mode of presentation types was included in Stella’s first utterance of (25), it should be the case that she could communicate what she meant through that very sentence in *all* contexts, including a context in which everyone knows Brigitte Bardot only as a middle-aged, animal rights activist.

Finally, according to Reimer, critics of HIT are not even in a position to lay too much emphasis on the disanalogy between the sort of tacit reference to mode of presentation types envisioned by the HIT theorist in connection with belief ascription sentences and those paradigmatic cases of tacit reference exhibited by (3) “It’s raining.” Reimer’s claim is that *not all* instances of paradigmatic tacit reference are immediately recognized as such by speakers. Thus, some Tucson resident who is unaware of the reality of time zones could fail to know that reference to *mountain time* is made through her utterance of (28) “It’s 3:10 pm.”¹⁵ After being given a brief lecture on time zones, this imaginary Tucson resident would come to recognize that such reference was indeed made.

Although I am not persuaded by Reimer’s arguments, I believe that there is something to be gained by considering them alongside with Schiffer’s. Reimer claims that what Stella meant through her original use of (25) is given by (25)’, where Stella’s intended meaning is made more explicit. When meaning is construed in a sufficiently broad way, I would agree that there is some truth to Reimer’s contention. Yet, the sense in which Reimer may be said to be right in no way

¹⁵ The example is again Reimer’s.

constitutes good grounds to dismiss Schiffer's central points. For that broader sense of meaning gives us no reason to revise the semantics of belief ascriptions.

The fact that Stella, in uttering (25) "Jean-Luc Godard believes that Brigitte Bardot is selling her villa in St. Tropez and moving to Liverpool" for the first time, tacitly counts on the audience to respond to the utterance in a certain way does not imply that the sum total of her communicative intentions is a function of the literal meaning that the above sentence has for her. We may take Stella at her word and accept her initial insistence that all she literally meant by (25) is that Jean-Luc Godard believes that Brigitte Bardot is selling her villa in St. Tropez and moving to Liverpool." Yet, admitting this is wholly compatible with Stella's later realization – when presented with an imaginary context in which her words might be construed in a misleading way – that she intended her literal use of (25) to convey, non-literally and contextually, what could be more fully expressed by (25)'.

This is reminiscent of an example of Kripke's in "Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference." (Kripke, 1977) In the crime scene, a burglar tells another (29) "The cops are around the corner", intending to convey to his partner something like (30) "Let's get out of here." Now, surely the burglar could claim that all he meant by his literal utterance of (29) was just what the sentence says. This in no way implies that he could not later come to admit that his communicative intentions were not exhausted by the literal meaning of his words. Given the facts of the case, the burglar likely wanted his partner in crime to realize that they should both leave the scene immediately.

And Stella's later refusal, in the context of the animal rights meeting, to simply repeat her earlier utterance of (25) "Jean-Luc Godard believes that Brigitte Bardot is selling her villa in St. Tropez and moving to Liverpool" need not be seen as amounting to an admission that what she literally meant by her previous utterance of (25) is not exhausted by the very words in the sentence. Instead, Stella's refusal

to express her belief in the same way as she had done before is a natural consequence of her realization that re-using that very sentence would be contextually inappropriate, since the audience would take her assertion to be that Jean-Luc Godard believes that Brigitte Bardot, the middle-aged, animal rights activist is selling her villa in St. Tropez and moving to Liverpool.

Furthermore, the contrast with what Reimer refers to as the “paradigmatic cases” of tacit reference is as alive as ever. For no one can say that (3) “It’s raining” without *literally* intending to say that it is raining at some particular place or other. There is no conceivable contextual or pragmatic strategy for explaining away the sense that reference to a location is made in (3).

Interestingly, arguments like Reimer’s could be pushed in somewhat surprising directions. Let us suppose that Jean-Luc Godard knows exactly two women called ‘Brigitte Lyotard’. One of them is an aged philosopher, who occasionally puts on the mantle of public intellectual and writes articles for the Riviera newspapers. The other is a young actress whom Jean-Luc considers quite untalented. On a certain occasion, Jean-Luc tells Stella, in a conversation about the philosopher, that (31) “Brigitte Lyotard is smart but not very friendly”. Days later, he tells Stella, talking about the actress, that (32) “Brigitte Lyotard is friendly but not very smart..” Let us suppose further that Stella is in complete agreement with Jean-Luc Godard about the two women.

If Stella herself were to utter either of (31) and (32) in a context in which the identity of the person being talked about is not totally clear to her audience, her utterances could of course give rise to misunderstandings. It could be enquired of her, as the case may be, “What did you mean when you said that Brigitte Lyotard is friendly but not very smart?” or “What did you mean when you said that Brigitte Lyotard is smart but not very friendly?.” Stella could then make her meaning clear by using some description that picks out the actress or the philosopher.

However, while her use of such identifying descriptions could make her intended meaning clear, on *some* broader sense of meaning, we should not, for familiar reasons, conclude that the meaning of 'Brigitte Lyotard', is given by an associated description, picking out one of the two women who go by that name. But it would seem to me that an argument such as Reimer's, if at all valid as a criticism of Schiffer, should just as surely support a descriptivist view of proper names, which we have good reason to reject. I conclude that Reimer's argument should be treated with suspicion.

There is a lesson in Reimer's argument, however. It does seem to show that in using sentences containing proper names – both simple and indirect – we can be held accountable for the associations evoked for our audience by our use of proper names in such sentences and bound to supply clarification aimed at dissipating possible misunderstandings.

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